

the bartender is at the far end of the bar talking with a group of men in a language i don't understand. they look at me and begin to laugh.

pretending not to notice, i gesture with my empty bottle. the bartender ignores me.

"i'd like another beer, please."

still no response.

(in singapore i had encountered the same problem, only to find out that i could handle five men at the same time and still walk away in less than three pieces.)

i throw the bottle, smashing the mirror behind the bar, saying "fuck you" in a language everyone understands. then, making a quick head count, i remember the time i had my fortune told by a moustached woman who had gold teeth. "twelve," she had said, "is your unlucky number."

as two of the men block off the door, the rest engage in the familiar shattering of glass, letting me know what to expect; they surround me, the jagged edges of beer bottles like the teeth of so many pirahnas.

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what does it mean?

the girl on stage had the face of a young mayan princess, the body of a playboy centerfold. tugging at her black bikini bottoms, she smiled at me. and if i'd had it to bargain with, my soul would have been hers.

which brings to mind my 8th grade english teacher and the time she kept me after class to discuss something i had written. she paced back and forth in front of my desk, looking like a conviction-crazed prosecutor warming up for the kill. she waved my composition in front of my face like it was a piece of prized evidence. "this bit about looking up the girl's dress in your math class ... what does it mean?"

she had caught me by surprise, and i just sat there like a startled jackrabbit, blinded by a pair of approaching headlights.